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Gagosian Announces Historic Exhibition of Work by Ashley Bickerton in New York in September
Featuring Previously Unseen Series of Sculptures and Paintings from throughout His Career
Works Selected and Installation Planned by the Artist



Ashley Bickerton, *Sena, Cherry, and Kinez*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 72 1/2 × 96 1/8 inches (184.2 × 244.2 cm) © Ashley Bickerton. Photo: Rob McKeever

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I'm not interested in creating one single guillotine-edge of meaning. I'm interested in creating a system of swirling rapids and eddies of meaning that overlap to catch the spectator in between.

—Ashley Bickerton

NEW YORK, August 30, 2023—Gagosian is pleased to announce an exhibition of sculptures and paintings by Ashley Bickerton (1959–2022), including his never-before-seen *Blur* paintings. Intended as a career overview, the selection of works was made and installation planned by Bickerton during a trip to New York in spring 2022. It is the gallery's first solo exhibition of Bickerton's work, and the first since Gagosian announced its representation of the artist in 2022. The presentation of more than twenty-five works opens at 522 West 21st Street in New York on September 8, 2023.

Originally identified with the Neo-conceptualist/Neo-Geo tendencies of late-1980s New York, Bickerton made his name with ironic, abstracted constructions focused on themes of consumerism, identity, and value. When he relocated to the Indonesian island of Bali in 1993, his work took a

self-consciously ironic “exotic” turn, its ornate, crafted look contrasting sharply with the conceptual detachment of the artist’s previous output. In the last few years of his life, Bickerton brought his practice full circle, synthesizing its heterogeneous modes into an all-encompassing visual language. His approach and aesthetic have been remarked upon by an intergenerational array of artists including Matthew Barney, Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, and Jordan Wolfson, and this exhibition provides an opportunity to celebrate his legacy and continuing influence.

Bickerton’s *Blur* paintings, which depict figures and faces in extreme soft focus, were inspired by his chance rediscovery of a faded family snapshot. Each work begins as a digital photograph, which is then rendered as a haze of color punctuated by eyes in the form of colored dots. Produced during the last few months of the artist’s life and after he was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), the series evokes memories of friends and moments from his life without nostalgia. Bickerton’s use of sprayed acrylic paint and hyper-stylized color fields also recalls the time that the artist spent working with Jack Goldstein, while the vibrant palette resonates with that of his earlier sculptures. Suggesting a gradual disappearance of their subjects, these elegiac final canvases see Bickerton take a notably contemplative turn.

Alongside the paintings, Bickerton presents variations on some of his earlier, iconic sculptures. In *Tormented Self-Portrait: Susie at Arles (25 Years)*, he revisits, a quarter of a century after the original, one of his initial self-portrait constructions, a Minimalist-style box emblazoned with Bickerton’s obfuscatory signature/trademark, “Susie,” which first appeared in a painting from 1982, alongside an array of corporate logos associated with products consumed by the artist. While inspired by Van Gogh’s self-portraits—hence the reference to Arles—Bickerton’s work knowingly replaces conventional representation of its subject with an array of mass-produced options. “Maybe somewhere in this circumscribed liberty of obvious, eccentric, contradictory, and choiceless choices,” he wrote, “we can pinpoint an individual.”

The *Wall-Wall* series, begun in 1985, also consists of quasi-industrial constructions, these inset with painted or cast resin rocks (a combination inspired by a garden wall spotted in Mexico) and inscribed with narratives. “I felt that ultimately art needed to offer some form of psychic and emotional transport,” wrote Bickerton, “which my brick walls were designed purposefully not to do, so I added overly literary texts.” A bloated, fleshy sculpture titled *F.O.B.: Tied (White)* (the acronym stands for “Fresh Off Boat” or “First [Day] On Beach”) is also a self-portrait; based on the artist’s measurements, it embodies his feelings on returning to the tropics from winters in New York.

Several large works in the exhibition also reflect Bickerton’s love of the ocean. *Clear Shark* and *Double Manta (Clear)* belong to a series of sculptures in polyurethane resin hung with interpretations of traditional crafted artifacts and plastic bags filled with clear liquid suggesting IV fluid, while *Water Vector 1 (Gray)* and *Water Vector 2 (Gray)* incorporate found beach detritus into elaborate mixed-media assemblages featuring boxes with mirrored interiors, satellite images of water and river patterns etched on glass, handles for installation, and covers for protection.

Ashley Bickerton was born in 1959 in Barbados, and died in Bali, Indonesia, in 2022. He received his BFA from the California Institute of the Arts in 1982 and graduated from the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 1985. Collections include the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada; Tate Britain, London; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; and Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. Solo exhibitions include Singapore Tyler Print Institute (2006); Newport Street Gallery, London (2017); and FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2017). Group exhibitions include *The Living Years: Art after 1989*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2012); *In the Dust of this Planet*, San Antonio Museum of Art, (2016); *Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s*, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC (2018); and *The Greek Gift*, DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art, Hydra, Greece (2021).

#AshleyBickerton

ASHLEY BICKERTON

Opening reception: Friday, September 8, 6–8pm

September 8–October 14, 2023

522 West 21st Street, New York

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